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Chairman: Mr. TSHERING (Phutan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN (A/50/163, A/50/215-S/1995/475, A/50/456, A/50/537, A/50/672)

AGENDA ITEM 111: PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (A/50/511, A/50/565)

1. Mr. FALL (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights), introducing agenda item 110, said that despite the many terrible images of human folly which constantly assailed public opinion, it should be recalled that the United Nations had achieved major successes in protecting the rights of children and ensuring their survival, health and education. As a result of the campaign for universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the number of States parties had reached 181. Increased efforts must now be made to ensure that its provisions were reflected in the daily lives of children the world over.

2. The international community and the United Nations had not been, and would not be, indifferent to the sufferings of children, and efforts to combat their exploitation were urgently needed. The issue of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, had been on the agenda of the Organization since 1982. The latest report of the Special Rapporteur on that issue (A/50/456) identified a number of priority areas, including the protection of children's rights within judicial systems and their promotion through education.

3. Various United Nations bodies had also considered the problem of the recruitment of children into military units and their involvement in armed conflicts, in which many of them had been killed or wounded or had been traumatized by the savagery of the events they had witnessed. The preliminary draft of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the minimum age at which children could be recruited into the armed forces had been submitted to the Commission on Human Rights at its fiftieth session.

4. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action also emphasized the need to take action to solve the problems of street children and refugee, displaced or sick children, particularly those infected with the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS).

5. The progress report on the study of the impact on children of armed conflict (A/50/537) showed that children were increasingly becoming the targets of armed conflict, and not only the victims but also the perpetrators of atrocities.

6. The High Commissioner for Human Rights had drafted a plan of action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A revised text had been supplied to all the States parties to the Convention, with a view to its gradual implementation beginning in January 1996. A conference of the States parties was also to consider a proposal to increase to 18 the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

7. The Fourth World Conference on Women had attached high priority to the rights and freedoms of the girl child, including access to education, health care and adequate nutrition and protection from all forms of discrimination, forced marriage, violence and traditional practices injurious to children's health.

8. Introducing agenda item 111 in his capacity as Coordinator for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, he recalled that the Commission on Human Rights, at its fifty-first session, had adopted with minor changes the short-term programme of activities for 1995 approved by the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session. A draft programme of activities for the Decade, adopted by the technical meeting held in Geneva from 20 to 22 July 1995, was annexed to the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/511).

9. The success of the Decade would depend on the commitment and the human and financial resources which the specialized agencies were able to bring to the economic development of indigenous peoples. The executive heads of the agencies had agreed to cooperate in identifying existing programmes and developing new projects to benefit indigenous peoples. The possibility of joint projects, which could make better use of available resources, was also under consideration.

10. The Voluntary Fund for the Decade had now been established and a number of pledges and contributions had already been made. He appealed to Governments to contribute to the financing of activities under the Decade. Initial steps had also been taken to establish an indigenous peoples unit within the Centre for Human Rights.

11. Ms. CALCETAS-SANTOS (Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights), introducing the provisional report on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/50/456), said that in approaching those phenomena of child abuse, she had concentrated first and foremost on general considerations and methodology, rather than on specific situations and cases. She had taken a four-pronged approach to achieving the objectives of her mandate. First, setting the parameters of the mandate, through more precise definitions of its three components, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and avoid any confusion among the three components. Second, reviewing the causes of the phenomena included in the mandate, in order to determine what action could be taken on a priority basis. An analysis of the multifarious causes of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography showed that, for most countries, poverty was the root cause, often interlinked with other factors such as migration, family disintegration and the breakdown of societal values. Third, determining of the most effective strategies for combating such abuses. Curative remedies were a luxury which most countries could ill afford; at best, what were often established were mere palliatives. There was therefore a need to institute preventive measures which created less upheaval in terms of human and logistical requirements. Fourth, identifying the catalysts or agents of change best suited to implementing preventive measures. That determination, to be effective, must be based on pragmatic and realistic considerations.

12. After studying the wide-ranging recommendations made by different forums concerned with children, she had identified three tools in the search for preventive solutions: education, both formal and informal, the judicial system and the media. Those three catalysts were already in place in most parts of the world; each one, properly sensitized, could be an invaluable advocate for children. Acting in partnership, they would have a compelling force that would make a tremendous impact in the area of child protection.

13. In respect of the sale of children, the media and the education system could work together on information and education campaigns about the perils which children faced and the various enticements and ruses resorted to by recruiters. The judicial system could ensure recourse for the airing of complaints and prosecution of those who neglected or abused children. In the areas of child prostitution and child pornography, the dire consequences for the child's physical and mental well-being should be fully publicized. The media should be made aware of the power which they wielded in moulding the character and moral values of both children and adults - not only parents or guardians but also potential and actual abusers. Modern technology had lent an unprecedented degree of sophistication to recruitment, solicitation and advertising for children in prostitution and pornography, making many protective laws and mechanisms obsolete. The effective prosecution and punishment of adult wrongdoers should be publicized to send a clear signal against future incursions into children's rights.

14. The judicial system should also police itself against double victimization of the child, whether as complainant or offender. Many international initiatives had already addressed the needs of the child as offender. A better balance had to be achieved by giving similar attention to the child as victim. When a child came to court as a complainant, insensitive handling could result in a denial of redress and further aggravate the agonies and indignities already suffered. The changing global environment added more complexities: wider diversity of country situations, transitional economies and changes due to democratization all called for aggressive and innovative solutions. It was to be hoped that joint cooperation in a more focused campaign involving agencies, both international and local, governmental and non-governmental, would eventually result in a climate that would produce whole children, unimpaired by any trauma of child abuse.

15. Mr. ALLOUGH (Morocco), speaking on agenda item 100, said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had now been ratified by 181 countries, had been successful in transforming essential needs into enforceable rights. The achievement of its objectives would help to protect some 30 million children, who were exposed to disease, famine and malnutrition, particularly in Africa.

16. Armed conflict was not the only factor which seriously jeopardized children's development, although millions of children had been killed, injured or made homeless by war in the past decade. In many developing countries, children were forced to work from an early age or were subject to exploitation in the form of prostitution, pornography or delinquency. Discrimination against girls was rife in certain countries where archaic traditions and attitudes persisted. However, it was the economic and social marginalization of poor

countries which deprived children of the right to realize their physical and intellectual potential, complete their education, find work and become well-adjusted, economically productive and socially responsible adults.

17. Since Morocco had achieved its independence, children had occupied an important place in national policy and were protected by Moroccan legislation in accordance with the precepts of Islam. The Government had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 and had drawn up a national programme of action for child survival, protection and development, the objectives of which included combating malnutrition, improving school attendance and protecting children in particularly difficult circumstances, as well as reducing educational disparities between girls and boys and between urban and rural areas and improving access by disadvantaged children to basic services. The Government had also set itself the goal of eradicating the more serious childhood diseases and in recent years had achieved 80 per cent immunization coverage through vaccination campaigns conducted in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

18. His Government reiterated its support for the recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, particularly with regard to the girl child and international cooperation in ensuring social progress for all children. The situation of children in Africa deserved particular understanding and support. All children must be able to exercise their rights to education, health and development.

19. Mr. WILLIS (Australia), speaking on agenda item 111, said that his Government supported the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People as a framework for action to promote the rights of indigenous peoples and an opportunity to focus international attention on the difficulties faced by such peoples and the contribution made by their cultures to human society in general. The programme of activities for the Decade must be based on a true and equitable partnership. His Government was pleased to put forward for consideration by the General Assembly at its current session a draft resolution adopting the final programme of activities for the Decade.

20. The success of the Decade would depend on effective planning and coordination. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Centre for Human Rights must be given the necessary resources to fulfil their responsibilities. More also needed to be done to encourage the United Nations specialized agencies to address the concerns of indigenous peoples in their programmes, and follow-up was required to implement the recommendations of recent world conferences.

21. A major objective of the Decade was the adoption by the General Assembly of a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. His Government welcomed the establishment of a working group of the Commission on Human Rights to draft such a declaration and believed that maximum participation by indigenous groups was essential for the group's credibility. The question of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples within the United Nations system was another important initiative which his Government was keen to support.

22. At the national level, a vital ingredient for the success of the Decade would be the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to ensure full cooperation between Governments and indigenous groups in planning and implementing activities. In Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) had established a National Indigenous Advisory Committee to assist in meeting the objectives of the Decade, for example, by increasing awareness of indigenous rights and issues among the wider Australian community.

23. His Government had embodied in legislation a process of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians which was to culminate in 2001. Activities under the Decade would assist the on-going constructive discussions taking place between indigenous representatives and key sectors of Australian society by providing opportunities to build community support for indigenous causes. The process would be further assisted by exchanges of information with other Governments and indigenous peoples through international conferences and seminars. His Government was also committed to achieving social justice and empowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and would ensure that there was full consultation at all levels when decisions directly affecting indigenous Australians were taken.

24. The Decade would provide an opportunity for the international community to redress the wrongs suffered by indigenous peoples over the centuries. His delegation urged Governments to commit themselves to a full partnership with indigenous peoples in developing policies and programmes which recognized the latter's rights and end marginalization and injustice.

25. Mr. AL-HITTI (Iraq), speaking on agenda item 110, said that his Government had made every effort to guarantee children protection by passing legislation to assist their development in every way. Iraq had become a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1994. However, further efforts at both the international and national levels had been severely affected by the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq since 1990, which had particularly affected vulnerable groups. It was anomalous that the United Nations, while calling for the rights of the child to be respected and for the Convention on the Rights of the Child to be universally ratified, was at the same time imposing comprehensive sanctions on the people of Iraq, of whom 43.6 per cent were children.

26. A 1994 UNICEF report stated that more than 3 million Iraqi citizens were threatened by various illnesses and that 2,250,000 of those were children under the age of five years who were suffering from malnutrition. In September 1994, the World Food Programme (WFP) had estimated that 4 million Iraqis, including 2.4 million children under the age of five years, were extremely malnourished. A senior official of WFP had stated in September 1995 that, in Iraq, he had observed the worst scenario of his working life and that the dangerous shortage of food and medicines had caused irreversible harm to a whole generation of Iraqis. The regional director of WFP had stated that 4 million Iraqis, one fifth of the population, 2.4 million of whom were children under five years of age, were seriously at risk because of lack of food. Reports by international organizations showed that 76 per cent of the Iraqi population had no access to clean drinking water because of the ban imposed on imports of chlorine, in addition to the difficulties of maintaining water supply facilities.

27. Ministry of Health statistics showed an enormous increase in mortality and child mortality rates since the imposition of sanctions, due to lack of food and medicines. The statistics also showed a steep rise in recorded cases of malnutrition and emaciation. Further, official reports indicated a serious increase in the number of low-birth-weight babies since 1990. There had been a large rise in infant mortality and in the number of deaths among women of child-bearing age. Prior to 1990, the Government's maternal and child health policies had succeeded in greatly reducing such deaths.

28. Infectious diseases which had long been completely eliminated in Iraq had begun to reappear among children, particularly poliomyelitis, cholera and scabies, and there had also been a large increase in the incidence of typhoid, measles, pneumonia, hepatitis, oedema, malaria and diphtheria. Many Iraqi children were suffering from psychological conditions caused by the bombing raids carried out on residential neighbourhoods during the war, which had also caused miscarriages and premature births. Birth defects had been caused by the kind of bombs used, which had emitted poisonous gases.

29. Children's education was being adversely affected by the fall in the standard of living and the rise in transport and other costs. The sanctions prohibited even lead pencils from being imported, while children were needed in the labour market to help increase family incomes.

30. The time had come for the Security Council to take immediate measures to relieve the children and people of Iraq of that injustice by applying paragraph 22 of Security Council resolution 687 (1991), Iraq having completed all actions contemplated in paragraphs 8 to 13. The Security Council had a moral and legal responsibility to respect the resolutions it had adopted.

31. Ms. CHEN Peijie (China), speaking on agenda item 110, said that the international community was deeply concerned about problems such as the resettlement of refugee children, the protection of children in armed conflict, street children, the exploitation of child labour and child prostitution, the sale, abduction and illegal adoption of children and children who were a prey to drugs. Concerted efforts by all nations were necessary to explore ways and means of enhancing international cooperation in that regard.

32. China was a populous developing country where minors accounted for one third of the population. The Chinese family had traditionally strong bonds and the Government attached importance to fostering, educating and protecting children. It had signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was in the process of strengthening legislation in that connection and establishing mechanisms to monitor, implement and promote the protection of children.

33. In March 1995, the Government had, as required under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, submitted to the United Nations its initial report on the general implementation of the Convention, which it had made an important element of publicizing the Convention in China. In the course of preparing the report, the Government had conducted discussions with Government departments, social groups and representatives of youth organizations. That had helped to enhance public awareness of what the Government was doing to protect the rights of the

child, since in a vast country like China the resources of the Government alone were not sufficient to disseminate that knowledge.

34. Although China was a developing country facing difficult tasks of economic development and social progress, the Government was doing its utmost to create an environment where children could be reared in a spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.

AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES, QUESTIONS RELATING TO REFUGEES, RETURNEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS (continued) (A/C.3/50/L.17, L.18 and L.19)

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.17

35. Mr. SOAL (South Africa), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.17 on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of African States, said that in the third line of paragraph 25, the words "the International Committee of the Red Cross" should be added after "humanitarian organizations"; in the same paragraph, the phrase "and to engage specifically in the building of capacity to mobilize effective regionalized burden-sharing by the High Commissioner, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations humanitarian organizations" should be replaced by "with".

36. In paragraph 26, the words "within the context of effective regional burden-sharing with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, other appropriate United Nations humanitarian organizations," should be deleted and replaced by "in close collaboration with". In the same paragraph, the words "other intergovernmental organizations" should be deleted and the words "in Africa" should be added after "non-governmental organizations".

37. The draft resolution was essentially the same as the resolution adopted at the forty-ninth session, except that references to specific countries had been omitted. The Group of African States hoped that the draft resolution would be supported by all delegations, as a demonstration by the international community of its continued concern for the plight of refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa.

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.18

38. Ms. WAHBI (Sudan), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.18, said that the draft resolution was the same as the resolution adopted by consensus at the forty-ninth session. The essential goal was to bring about the return of unaccompanied refugee minors to their families. The draft resolution was entirely apolitical and she hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

Draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.19

39. Mrs. NEWELL (Secretary of the Committee) said that in the first preambular paragraph, of draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.19, the word "Recalling" should be changed to "Noting"; in the second preambular paragraph, the word "Also" should be deleted; and in paragraph 3, the word "returnees" should be deleted and the words "and returnees" should be added after "involuntary displacement".

40. Mr. PARSHIKOV (Russian Federation), introducing draft resolution A/C.3/50/L.19, said that Sweden should have been included in the original list of sponsors and that Finland, Israel, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan had become sponsors of the draft resolution. The draft resolution was similar to the resolution adopted at the forty-ninth session; the new elements were to be found in paragraphs 4, 5, 6 and 8. His delegation hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.